

CT COMMUNITY NONPROFIT ALLIANCE



formerly



To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

From: Jeff Walter, Interim CEO, CT Community Nonprofit Alliance

Re: Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on H.B. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDATURES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017.

Date: February 18, 2016

Good evening distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Jeff Walter, Interim CEO for CT Community Nonprofit Alliance. CT Nonprofit Alliance represents more than 550 community nonprofit organizations and associations across the state and is the largest advocacy organization representing community nonprofits in Connecticut. Our members serve more than 500,000 Connecticut residents each year.

I am here today in opposition to the Governor's proposed FY 17 budget revisions, which threatens the health and well-being of Connecticut residents by cutting spending in every area in which nonprofits serve our communities.

In total, this budget cuts core programs and services by over \$408 million. Put another way, 72% of the total cuts proposed by the Governor will fall on state agencies that support community nonprofits.

If this budget is adopted as is, it will destabilize the community based service system that so many of Connecticut's citizens rely on. Families use services across multiple agencies (DMHAS, DDS, DPH), relying on them as a safety net of supports. This budget puts services in many areas at risk, and will threaten family units and ultimately the system as a whole.

Once again, the Governor is proposing to cut grants for mental health and substance abuse services, this time by almost \$16 million. The reality is that families' circumstances have not changed since the last budget session: those in need of mental health treatment still have a difficult time finding services.

If funding for these programs is eliminated, residents will have nowhere to turn as providers are forced to close programs. Instead, they will seek much costlier care through emergency departments and hospitals, or worse, they may end up in jail. Medicaid rates that are now replacing state grants are neither adequate nor comprehensive enough to cover the true cost of care. This cut is unsustainable and will, in many instances, close outpatient services for uninsured residents. New and increased Medicaid enrollment will not solve this ongoing problem.

The Governor is also proposing to cut \$34 million to the combined block grant “Agency Operations” account at DMHAS, and we are concerned that this cut could potentially eliminate outpatient mental health and substance abuse programs altogether.

This budget would also cut more than \$55 million from the Department of Developmental Services, including cuts to employment opportunities and day services and behavioral support programs and opportunities for people to live in the community. More than \$31 million of this cut will fall on the combined block grant “Agency Operations” account at DDS. This cut could disproportionately fall on critical programs that serve people with disabilities across Connecticut.

Further, funding for School Based Health Centers (SBHC) has been reduced by \$477,431, potentially crippling the capacity of SBHC to serve children. SBHCs play a critical role in identifying, serving and treating at-risk youth through integrated, barrier-free medical and behavioral health services. Without adequate funding, SBHC will be forced to cut services, meaning that students in need of mental health services may go without care altogether, or will be forced onto a waiting lists rather than being seen at school before their conditions worsen.

Connecticut’s community nonprofits deliver the state’s core services, yet they are forced to operate on limited funding, the result of repeated rescissions and chronic underfunding. Doing more with less is not an option.

The individuals served by community nonprofits are some of the state’s most needy citizens, and in many instances, those who strive every day to increase or regain their independence. The services they receive are life sustaining. They are our children and parents, our neighbors and friends. Without community services, they will have no place to go to meet their needs.

For the past two legislative sessions, the legislature has restored funding to maintain critical DMHAS and DDS programs, proving that you take the needs and well-being of CT residents seriously. Please continue to support these services.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at jwalter@ctnonprofitalliance.org.